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Jousting With CIA Jackasses

By Bradley Miller
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AS incredibly naive as so much Western thinking and policymaking regarding the Soviets seem to us anti-Soviet hawks, how naive must they seem to the Soviets themselves? Soviet defector Vladimir Sakharov, who was in Dallas last week, made some interesting observations, mostly, but not wholly, in confirmation of my preconceptions.

Sakharov defected in 1971 at the age of 26. He'd been educated in Moscow's most prestigious university and trained for diplomatic service in the Middle East, where he worked closely with the KGB. He is now connected with the Jamestown Institute and a California organization that analyzes East-West tensions. The Jamestown Institute, based in Washington, D.C., tries to improve Western understanding of the Soviets by encouraging the intelligent and humane use of Soviet defectors.

UNTIL TALKING with Sakharov I was unaware of the scandalous way the CIA treats Soviet defectors. He and the Jamestown Institute offer impressive evidence that this treatment is both outrageously inhumane and costly to U.S. interests. As he has written, "The only authoritative source of information on the Kremlin is the high-level Soviet defector."

No one, of course, suggests that stringent measures aren't necessary in handling defectors. There is the obvious danger that the defector is either a double agent or vulnerable to KGB reprisals. Sakharov describes himself as "one of the lucky ones," for he eventually escaped the CIA's aegis thanks to his persistence and his case's coming to the attention of those who decided to help him. He is now doing what he likes, which is studying, writing and lecturing about U.S.-Soviet tensions and working for improved treatment of defectors.

As things stand, the CIA forbids defectors from working in their fields, and the false identities and backgrounds they give them mean that they can get only the lowest jobs, no matter how advanced their educational or professional credentials. Once it has milked a defector for all the information it thinks he has, Sakharov says, the agency prefers that he become a non-person. He says the problem is that lower-level bureaucrats seem to revel in making life impossible for defectors, while those at the top remain unaware of it. This is what the Jamestown Institute is trying to change, and so far it has found a good deal of support.

"THE REAL beneficiary of (CIA treatment of defectors) is the KGB," Sakharov writes. "They no longer have to hunt defectors down and destroy them. The CIA does it for them."

Confronting the CIA's bureaucratic obstacles at every step, unable to have a normal social life — marriage, too, is strongly discouraged — and able to get only the lowest jobs, many defectors become alcoholic and suicidal. In some cases they actually have been driven to return to the Soviet Union, giving the Kremlin the perfect propaganda coup. Citing case histories, the KGB warns agents that defectors wind up worse off than those who remain loyal to the KGB.

Sakharov not only has survived all that, but gone on to flourish and revel in the freedom of American life. But he is amazed at the naivete with which so many American analysts view the Kremlin.

AMAZED, for example, at all the gulls who still think, despite the long history of Soviet treaty violations, that somehow the world would be better off if we signed more treaties. He says that the chief goal of Soviet intelligence is to determine when the Kremlin should launch a pre-emptive nuclear strike. That is, to determine what Soviet actions (if any) the United States would deem deserving of a nuclear response, for Moscow's goal is to make itself invulnerable to it by developing both a pre-emptive first-strike and the very kind of strategic defense it is trying to stop the United States from developing.

How do Kremlin officials themselves view all those in Congress, the media and the intelligentsia whose naivete plays into their hands? With the disdain that certain New Yorkers have for those in the hinterlands, Sakharov says. But there is this difference: The Kremlin's disdain is fully justified.

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